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ABSTRACT

In 1988, the Dutch Parliament adopted a motion that must result in an improvement of quality and in the integration of environmental studies in education for the 5 to 16 age group within the next few years. Within the scope of basic education, certain committees received a commission from the minister of education to pay explicit attention to environmental issues. The general aim is to integrate the insights and skills that are indispensable for making well-reasoned choices concerning man and the environment. For the period 1988-1992, a plan was launched that aimed to develop a core curriculum for environmental studies, the analysis of existing teaching materials, and regional refresher courses and implementation. An additional goal was to gear internal and external school activities to one another in a more effective manner. The government provided the financial means for implementing these new policies. The implementation will be the task of a national network for environmental studies where curriculum development, research, in-service training, and the development of teaching materials will take place in mutual cooperation. (JB)

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NEW INITIATIVES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES IN DUTCH EDUCATION

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Ladies and gentlemen,

In my contribution to this international conference I should like to draw your attention to developments in the Netherlands, which are relevant to the position and status of environmental studies. In the first place there is the decision taken by the Dutch government to introduce 'basic education' for all in secondary schools. In the second place there is the decision taken by Parliament this year to give environmental studies an obligatory position in education. In the third place there is the current national innovation project for Third World education (development education).
After fifteen years of Parliamentary discussion about the new contents of Dutch secondary education, the present government has cut the knot. An Education Bill has been put forward, which is supposed to result in the introduction of basic education in 1997. This implies that after primary education all children will be offered a core curriculum consisting of 14 subjects. For these 14 subjects, such as physics and chemistry, biology, geography, history, economics and political education attainment targets will be laid down. Attainment targets describe the minimal amount of knowledge, insight and skills pupils should have mastered for each subject at the age of 15/16. Attainment targets will lead to a common core curriculum for all pupils and enable Parliament and society to check the quality of education.

Arguments for the introduction of basic education in secondary schools are:
- to raise the standards of education for young people
- to strengthen the common cultural basis
- to respond to the requirements of technological and socio-cultural developments.

The Minister of Education has set up committees whose members represent a wide range of organizations. In January 1989 these committees will have to make proposals for core curricula and attainment targets. Since new subjects such as information technology/ computer science, technological studies and economics will be added, a reduction of lesson for subjects such as biology, geography and history is unavoidable. This makes it

necessary to make choices about the contents of each subject. After all in basic education the emphasis is on the skills and abilities, which are indispensable, now and in the future, for a good member of an internationally oriented society.
This means that the central question in laying down core curricula will be: which elements should belong to the school's primary task and responsibility and which should belong to the parents' responsibility? It is impossible to respond to all the wishes and requirements of science and society, not only because of the limited scope of the curriculum, but also because by definition education must mean more than 'discussing social problems'. In order to stimulate systematic and coherent education, a choice has to be made from all the different claims society makes, such as: peace education, human rights education, development (i.e. Third World) education, European education, environmental studies, and in the Netherlands there is also the prevention of drug abuse and the holocaust. In the spring of 1989 there will be an answer to the question which of those subject-areas will be part of the prescribed contents for basic education.
It is remarkable how many political lobbies in the Netherlands have made an attempt to obtain a place in the core curriculum. Subjects that are not included are left to the interest of individual teachers, to their willingness to adopt them. For 20% of the total of the timetabled curriculum can be used according to the individual school's preference. Some schools will for instance choose for religious instruction.
It is worth mentioning that the minister of education will lay down the attainment targets, but will not interfere with methodological matters nor with the use of teaching materials. The general pedagogical climate is the responsibility of the school.

In the middle of this year Dutch Parliament has adopted a motion which must result in an improvement of quality and in the integration of environmental studies in education for the 5 to 16 age group within the next few years. Within the scope of basic education certain committees have received a commission by the minister of education to explicitly pay attention to environmental issues. The general aim is not the introduction of

a new subject, but rather the integration of insights and skills that are indispensable to be able to make well-reasoned choices when taking decisions about man and the environment. For the period of 1988 to 1992 a plan has been launched aiming at: the development of a core-curriculum for environmental studies, the analysis of existing teaching materials, regional refresher courses and implementation. A second aim is that of gearing internal and external school activities to one another in a more effective manner. Apart from new policies the government has also provided ample financial means. The implementation will be the task of a national network for environmental studies, where curriculum development, research, inservice-training and the development of teaching materials will take place in mutual cooperation.

What is the position of environmental studies in Dutch education at this moment? In other words: in what way and to what extent is environmental studies really practiced in primary and secondary education? In how far have the curriculum proposals and especially the teaching materials been spread among schools and teachers? How do teachers judge those products? To what extent and in what way are those products used in the classroom situation? How do pupils experience environmental studies and what are the teaching results?
Satisfactory answers to these questions cannot be given. The scarce research results that we have justify the conclusion that the teaching practice of environment studies remains mysterious to a large extent and gives us little cause for optimism.

In primary education, in spite of all the good intentions of all the people concerned, environmental studies is only a marginal phenomenon. Because of a lack of adequate dissemination strategies there has apparently not been a continued effect of the products of the first EC-network. The existing curriculum proposals for social studies in school offer hardly any clue for environmental studies. There is hardly any empirical information on the factual teaching practice, the use of teaching materials developed by environmental institutions, opinions of teachers, the methodology used and the results achieved.
Teachers who are very active have a greater willingness to try

out new teaching materials.
There is a real maze of all sorts of unrelated materials developed by all sorts of organizations. Many of these, however, are not being used very much.

As opposed to primary education there are some more research results on the role of environmental studies in secondary education. These results, however, are rather fragmentary, sometimes even very contradictory and present a similarly gloomy picture of the situation.
They show that projects on the environment have hardly brought about any change in pupils' knowledge, attitudes and behaviour with respect to environmental problems. Neither was there any change in the interest pupils took in certain environmental problems. The most crucial problems, they found, were those with far-reaching consequences such as poisoned soil or nuclear radiation.
Interviews with teachers have shown that they recognize the importance of environmental studies, but they don't treat the subject systematically. Mostly they respond to some startling news on television or to some specific problems in their own environment. Teachers also say that they do not have a clear objective when teaching environmental studies.

Moreover the results from a questionnaire sent to 250 schools have shown

- that the topics and the manner of teaching differ greatly;
- that only 30% of the schools make use of the relatively large supply of teaching materials developed by environmental organizations;
- that 60% of the teachers take the view that the supply of methodological material does not fit in with the wishes and possibilities of the teachers;
- that the interest in environmental questions cannot be taken for granted, but can differ from year to year;
- that the curriculum for social studies is already overloaded.

To sum up: in the Netherlands teaching practice in environmental studies is not clear with respect to the factual teaching and the results aimed at in the behaviour of pupils.

The scarce and fragmentary research results give us reason for the following assumptions:

- (very) little time is spent on environmental studies;
- if environmental elements are dealt with, this often happens implicitly, more or less haphazardly and they are seldom systematically integrated in the curriculum.
- we can hardly speak of a well-considered and aim oriented methodology;
- environmental studies is not a recognized area of interest;
- a rapid change of topics leads to problems with regard to contents and methodology;
- the professional potential of environmental organizations to develop useful teaching materials, is limited.

One of the essential conditions for an improvement of quality and the integration of environmental studies is either the realization of a minimal consensus on aims and contents, or the design of a core curriculum and the subdivision of the contents into separate subjects choosing on the one hand the scientific and on the other hand the sociological point of view.
After all it is important to know how the environment of man functions, but also how man uses the environment. The main issue is always the relation between man and environment.

A mere prescription - on a national level - of aims and objectives for environmental studies that broaden ecological knowledge, insights and skills and enable pupils to come to well-founded judgments, may lead to the embedding of the subject into existing curricula.

It is interesting that in the Netherlands environmental organizations are more and more willing to cooperate. Former differences of opinion, which used to be very strong, seem to have faded away. There is a noticeable shift of interest from the "roots" to the eventual "fruits" of environmental studies. The importance of paying more attention to and spending more energy on implementation issues is generally recognized.
The government's intention to introduce basic education and to lay down core curricula is undoubtedly a major influence. After

all a solid position in the core curriculum enhances the subject's right to exist and to be subsidized.
Whoever attempts to overlook the whole field of environmental studies and to analyse the problems therein will greatly benefit from moments of reflection. It is sensible to look upon environmental studies as one of the many claims that society wishes the educational system to respond to. Without pretending to give a full catalogue of all other aspects, which should be included in the curriculum, I'd like to mention consumer education, health education, development (i.e. Third World) education, sexual education, global education (educating children to become world citizens), traffic education and peace education. With all these educational claims, however, one should be aware of the opposition towards such new tasks in the schools.

Some counter-arguments are:

- There are too many such claims, which, however socially relevant they may be, cannot all be given due credit in the limited time available.
- Rapid changes are already taking place in the curricula of the well-established school subjects; moreover the debate about the scope and the contents of the new areas of interest has not been decided yet.
- Some people are suspicious and fear a too 'pressure group oriented' approach in education, particularly if behavioural changes are given prominence in the aims.

More or less alerted by recent developments in educational policies, people involved in environmental studies have become aware of the implementation problems. In tackling these problems one might profit strategically from similar developments in other peripheral areas of attention. A good example is the approach in the area of 'development (i.e. Third World) education in The Netherlands', which has proved to be of great value in at least one essential respect. In this area we have succeeded - in fruitful cooperation with a variety of groups involved and under the auspices of SLO - in developing a core curriculum. A publication with clear proposals for contents, place and methodological aspects of development education, with suggestions for inclusion in well-established subjects and

examples for lessons in schools. Such a curriculum framework will have a directive function towards examination syllabi and further material development, the organization of refresher courses and research. Education about Third World countries should be a compulsory part of the curriculum for the 4 to 19 age group by 1991.

Ladies and gentlemen,
I have presented you with a rather gloomy picture of environmental studies in Dutch education. This is the state of affairs at the national level.

However, there are many instances of schools, in which teachers with much enthusiasm and energy treat such topics as waste, energy, air, ecology and society. An inventory has shown that more than one hundred lessons, games and projects are available for schools. However, the number of teachers interested in teaching about environmental problems is small. In spite of all this I am optimistic about the future position and status of environmental studies in all schools. There is reason for optimism if one considers the decision taken by Parliament to integrate environmental studies in established subjects. In fact this should be taken for granted. One may expect education to enable future citizens to contribute to a restoration of a permanent relation to the environment. Environmental problems cannot be solved by pupils. What can be done is to create a basis for a more responsible behaviour towards the environment in the future. To achieve this, knowledge about the environment is needed.
Better education about environmental issues is not a national matter. In view of the magic year '1992' I believe it is important to create effective forms of cooperation among institutes from both the formal and the informal sections of education in Europe.
I hope that this conference can be the starting-point to join forces and to bring together professional 'know-how' in a European context. Among politicians in Europe environmental issues are a top priority.